

## **Submission to Inquiry into Teacher Education**

**from the Learning and Teaching Team in the School of Education, University of New England, Armidale NSW 2351.**

The Learning and Teaching team at UNE teach units in different teacher education awards (Graduate Diploma in Education, Bachelor of Education, Bachelor of Teaching). Their responsibility is to teach units which focus on how people learn and how to set up situations which will encourage their students to be active learners.

Our response to the Terms of Reference and other statements is presented below.

### **Terms of Reference:**

1. Examine and assess the criteria for selecting students for teacher training courses.

The language used provides insight into the Minister's philosophy and understanding of teacher education. As summarised in an American report into teacher preparation, *Research-Based Characteristics of High-Quality Teacher Preparation* (ASCD 2003a), teachers are prepared, not trained. Use of 'training' and 'trainees' conveys an impression that there is a particular way to teach and that teacher education simply involves elucidating this particular way. We do not have journals of Teacher Training or courses in Teacher Training — the word 'education' implies that courses and preparation programs involve much more than simple training.

Having a broad community discussion of criteria for selecting students for teacher education is an excellent idea. We need to broaden selection criteria beyond academic performance, especially academic performance based on examination results. What will such selection criteria be? The Schools Recommendation Admission Scheme is one different entry pathway but it has serious shortcomings, especially in the early years of a program. Interestingly, at UNE, a slightly higher percentage of SRAS students finish their degrees than UAI students (Johnson, 2005).

Two criteria which need examining are standards of literacy and numeracy. Many students are admitted to teacher education courses with very poor standards of literacy and numeracy, and these standards are not always related to a low UAI score. Many students with high UAIs have literacy and numeracy problems (as evidenced in data collected by our Faculty Mentor). Dealing with poor literacy and numeracy leads to a significant increase in teacher educators' workloads.

Poor standards of literacy and numeracy can be hidden to some extent by students. Assignments which are word processed can disguise a student's true level of competence. Oral presentations, both at university and on prac, can mask poor literacy standards. Teachers can be reluctant to fail students on prac for poor standards of literacy and numeracy, if their lesson planning and other aspects of teaching are satisfactory. We do not do the teaching profession, schools or students any favours by graduating students who have poor levels of literacy or numeracy. Perhaps selection criteria should exist both for entry to teacher education courses, and for exit from them (Certificates of Competence?). We are investigating this possibility at UNE.

2. Examine the extent to which teacher training courses can attract high quality students, including students from diverse backgrounds and experiences.

Someone with less than ‘top notch’ academic performance can become an excellent teacher. However there is a real need for teachers to be educated, widely read, experienced in several areas (jobs, skills, qualifications). We believe mature age entrants to teaching are more likely, on average, to have the range of background experiences and skills required for effective teaching.

The Inquiry wishes to establish ‘how the needs of mature age entrants to the profession can better be met’. This statement assumes their needs are not being met appropriately now. Is there any evidence for this assumption?

Given the demands of teaching today, there is good reason to attract far more mature-age people into teaching and to make their paths into teaching as smooth as possible. The presence of mature-age students in initial teacher education classes generally has a very positive impact on class culture and climate. We believe there is an argument for not accepting school-leavers into initial teacher education programs. Most novice teachers benefit from some life experience beyond school.

A related question is whether teacher education courses should be graduate-entry courses. Our current thinking is that the pathway directly from school into teacher education courses is not appropriate.

One mechanism we would like to see explored is that of allowing prospective teachers to gain experience in a school as a teacher’s aide, and then to come to university to gain their qualification. Such students would then have some background experience in schools to make their university learning more meaningful. Coming straight from school to university means a prospective teacher does not have much ‘life experience’ to bring to teaching. Coming to university after many years away from any experience in a school can also be difficult because (some) schools have changed a lot in recent years. Both candidates for the teaching profession would benefit from a period spent as a teacher’s aide before enrolling in their studies. We would like to see this alternative pathway investigated.

3. Examine attrition rates from teaching courses and reasons for that attrition.

Data on attrition would be welcome. Examining and broadening selection criteria for entry to teacher education courses is related to attrition— many students are not suitable candidates for teaching but their suitability is not made evident through a UAI score or any other single-item entry hurdle. In some cases university lecturers are immediately aware that a student is not likely to become a successful teacher but there is no mechanism apart from counselling to get that message across to a student, especially if the student is able to pass written assignments. Broadening the selection criteria in the way mentioned in point (2) would be one way to improve attrition rates, because prospective teachers would have some experience of teaching before deciding whether to enrol in a teacher education course. The attrition would occur before enrolment rather than after, thus saving time and expense for everyone concerned.

Some attrition is unavoidable in any course. In the case of teacher education, some attrition is caused by students' recognising that their skill base is inadequate. Graduate entry or life-experience entry would overcome this reason to some extent. Some attrition is caused by a realisation of the difficulties involved in teaching (workload, support, facilities, mobility). Working as a teacher's aide would help to overcome this reason for attrition.

Many students are not informed about the realities of teaching before they enrol in a teacher education course. Many enrol because they did not get sufficient marks to enrol in their first-choice course. Some initial and extended experience in schools before completing the university part of their qualification would help increase prospective teachers' awareness of what the job entails.

4. Examine and assess the criteria for selecting and rewarding education faculty members.

Most universities have well-established mechanisms for selecting and rewarding their staff. Is the intention to produce a 'one-selection-criterion-fits-all' approach? Given the diversity of universities, this approach does not seem viable.

This point may be a reference to the lack of recent teaching experience of many teacher education lecturers. Teaching in university is different from teaching in schools, but actual workloads are higher for most academics. Most Education staff members would welcome the opportunity to spend more time in schools in order to keep their knowledge current about the realities of teaching. Research opportunities are helpful in this regard, and visits to students doing their practicum, but such opportunities are rare and difficult to fit in for most academics. In our case, our students are scattered throughout NSW and other States when doing practicum, and even if funding were available for visits (which it isn't), all students do not do their practicum at the same time and visits to some students would mean lack of classes for others. Research and Service commitments also make absences from campus difficult to fit into a very busy timetable.

This point needs to be set in a much wider debate about universities and their roles in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and the respective roles of universities and schools in preparing future teachers.

5. Examine the educational philosophy underpinning the teacher training courses (including the teaching methods used, course structure and materials, and methods for assessment and evaluation) and assess the extent to which it is informed by research.

Is there a hidden agenda here — is the aim to unify 'philosophies of education' across tertiary institutions? The Inquiry wishes to elucidate 'the educational philosophy underpinning the teacher-training courses'. There are many different paths to the development of high-quality teachers and each has a different underlying philosophy but we suspect no university these days offers 'teacher training'. We want graduates who can be agents of change rather than people who just fit into the status quo. We want graduates who can adapt to

challenging situations and be competent problem solvers rather than teachers who have been ‘trained’ and who may not teach in a situation matching their training. The training model will not sustain and keep graduates in the profession, and the attrition rate of new teachers already indicates that such teachers do not feel well supported. A training model would provide even less support than they currently receive in a ‘teacher education’ approach.

Education has always suffered the taunt of being a ‘bandwagon’ subject, full of ‘fads’. There is, in fact, a strong research base in Education as in any other discipline. This research base may traditionally not have been seen as an important part of teacher preparation programs, especially when these programs were seen as ‘teacher training’ rather than as ‘teacher education’. In recent years there have been a lot of publications aimed at teachers (rather than at academics) which elucidate the research base for learning theory (e.g. ASCD 2003b) and for teaching strategies and their effectiveness (e.g. Marzano, Pickering and Pollock, 2001). Organisations for teachers, such as the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development in the United States, publish daily newsletters for teachers with regular updates on research.

In our team, teaching and assessment have a strong applied focus which is grounded in theory and research but which has a very practical representation. Current notions of effective learning recognise that a constructivist approach is more likely to lead to genuine learning and understanding. Teacher educators in our team implement a constructivist approach with a huge cost in terms of preparation time and marking time. It is morally justifiable to ‘practise what we preach’ but there is a very real cost in terms of workload given the pressures of the job which have increased enormously in recent years.

6. Examine the interaction and relationships between teacher training courses and other university faculty disciplines.

Are there any Education faculties in Australia? Most Faculties are aligned with other disciplines both nominally and through joint teaching of awards such as Combined Degrees. Nevertheless this inter-relationship is a valuable one to investigate and document. The idea that subject knowledge is sufficient to prepare effective teachers should be resisted — knowing science is not the same as knowing how to teach science, though both are important.

7. Examine the preparation of primary and secondary teaching graduates to:
  - (i) teach literacy and numeracy;
 

This is an area which definitely needs to be investigated. However the problem once again is related to funding, and to entry requirements. Not all students with literacy and numeracy problems have low UAIs. Once students are accepted into teacher education programs, there is an obligation to address their literacy and numeracy problems but the funding required is simply not available. There are many excellent programs in operation here at UNE, but only certain students are given access to them, or they have to be fitted in on top of a normal program of study (which is not the best approach for students trying to address a weakness).

(ii) teach vocational education courses;

(iii) effectively manage classrooms;

Classroom management should be a compulsory part of all teacher preparation programs. At UNE we have introduced a compulsory unit on behaviour management in our Bachelor of Education. The subject — both behaviour management and the broader ‘classroom management’ — is studied in all our teacher education awards but effective management is a skill that only develops with experience. Experience as a teacher’s aide would be valuable, as discussed above. An alternative route the Inquiry should consider is the employment of new teachers on a part-time basis (say, 60%) to allow time for them to address their particular needs (and perhaps to observe other teachers’ classroom management).

(iv) successfully use information technology;

Graduates are usually competent users of information technology. Resources to support their competence are often not available in schools.

(v) deal with bullying and disruptive students and dysfunctional families;

To what extent *should* teachers be expected to ‘deal’ with disruptive students and dysfunctional families? What is the effect on the non-disruptive students in the class? Why should their learning be compromised?

(vi) deal with children with special needs and/or disabilities;

Teacher education courses have a component related to teaching (not ‘dealing’!) with children with special needs and/or disabilities. Inclusive classrooms are morally defensible but need to be properly resourced if learning for *all* the students in such a class is to be effective.

(vii) achieve accreditation; and

Accreditation is the responsibility of State and Territory authorities which accredit teacher education courses.

(viii) deal with senior staff, fellow teachers, school boards, education authorities, parents, community groups and other related government departments.

‘Deal with’ borders on being offensive and certainly conveys an unprofessional image. We prepare our students to be professional in their relationships with children, parents, colleagues and the community.

A collaborative focus should apply in all the areas of point (7). Literacy and numeracy should be taught in primary school, reinforced in secondary school and reviewed in tertiary institutions where needed (when adequate funding is supplied for smaller class sizes, resources and support networks). An exploration of current programs should indicate how well pre-service teachers are prepared to teach literacy, numeracy, students with special needs, and to use information technology. Classroom and behaviour management may only come with experience in the field and maturity.

8. Examine the role and input of schools and their staff to the preparation of trainee teachers.

It would be worthwhile to consider such an input but funding needs to be investigated and confirmed. Teachers would need access to professional development in supervision and mentoring.

9. Investigate the appropriateness of the current split between primary and secondary education training.

By all means investigate this split. Cost-cutting is not a valid reason for teaching all pre-service teachers in common classes. It may well be that 'secondary education' also needs to be split because junior secondary and senior secondary teaching are very different. Middle school education may need to be implemented. Such changes in teacher education courses imply that changes in the schools themselves should also be investigated. Teacher education courses have to reflect school structures.

10. Examine the construction, delivery and resourcing of ongoing professional learning for teachers already in the workforce.

Apart from funding, other issues include:

- to what extent should individual teachers take personal responsibility for professional learning?
- the inequity in access to professional learning across and within schools/systems
- finding the right balance in schools between addressing system/school issues and supporting individuals in their personal professional learning goals.

In the midst of all this is the role of universities in professional learning for teachers and where the funds come from — how will universities maintain their independence and questioning of systems and schools?

Our guess is that teacher educators would be more than happy to be involved in teacher learning programs (professional development for teachers). Such teaching would have to be recognised in university workloads, which brings us back to the funding issue.

11. Examine the adequacy of the funding of teacher training courses by university administrations.

Yes, but the funding of preservice teachers by the government needs also to be investigated. It is not adequate for provision of the practicum experience that our students need.

The Inquiry wishes to investigate 'the adequacy of funding provided by universities to their Education faculties'. Again, this is not the correct focus. A

better question is whether universities have adequate income for their functions, specific study programs and facilities. Within universities, Faculties and Schools dealing with Education courses are not adequately funded for what they are attempting to do within the constraints of the Commonwealth-funded income received for initial teacher education. Moreover such Faculties/Schools fare badly in regard to capital works and facility maintenance. The specialist teaching facilities required (such as a gymnasium for Physical Education, Science laboratories for Science Education, Drama and Visual Art and Music facilities for Creative and Practical Arts Education, networked teaching spaces (apart from Computer Labs) for seminars and workshops) are worse than in many public schools, yet the standard in many public schools leaves a lot to be desired (as has been widely reported in the media both recently and over the past few years).

A separate but fundamental issue is prac funding. We would love to provide more in-school experiences for students but where will the funding come from? As a regional university, we do not have access to a large number of locally accessible schools. Almost all our students have to undertake their practicum experience at some distance from Armidale. We try to prepare our students for teaching in rural and remote locations but are unable to provide practical experiences in these locations for all our students. We do not believe it is realistic to fund initial teacher education students in the lowest HECS band but also expect an adequate amount of in-school experience (which we agree is essential) to be provided for them.

### **General point:**

The Inquiry wishes to establish 'whether teacher trainees are being effectively prepared to deal with all the challenges they face in the classroom'. This is the wrong question. A better question would be: 'Should teachers have to deal with all the challenges they are expected to deal with?'

It would be better to use this inquiry to have a broad community discussion on what it is reasonable to expect teachers to do. Can we define the limits of teacher roles? What current teacher work could more appropriately be done by others in schools, for example administration? teacher aides? What is the responsibility of parents for their own children and what is the responsibility of teachers when working in partnership with parents? What is unreasonable student behaviour for both the classroom teacher and the schools? When should particular students be placed in alternative specialist schools with appropriate whole-family, long-term counselling and other support services? Why is funding for such schools and services so inadequate (albeit a State responsibility)? What is the real (and greater) cost of not dealing with such problems until the consequences have to be dealt with later?

## References

Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) (2003a) Research-Based Characteristics of High-Quality Teacher Preparation. Research Brief Vol. 1, No. 4, 19 February.

Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) (2003b) The Effect of Classroom Practice on Student Achievement. Research Brief Vol.1, No.11, 27 May.

Johnson, A. (2005) Making students more than a number. Smith's Weekly, April, p.10.

Marzano, R.J., Pickering, D.J. and Pollock, J.E. (2001) Classroom Instruction that Works; Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement. Alexandria, VA: Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Submitted by the Learning and Teaching Team  
School of Education  
Faculty of Education, Health and Professional Studies  
University of New England  
Armidale NSW 2351  
Contact person: Linley Lloyd, Senior Lecturer  
Email: [linley.lloyd@une.edu.au](mailto:linley.lloyd@une.edu.au)